

Afghanistan

November 1986

Background: The current situation in Afghanistan is a direct outgrowth of the Soviet invasion of December 1979, when the Soviet Union sent troops into the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, executed Marxist Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin, and installed the puppet regime of Babrak Karmal.

Although the Soviets ostensibly entered Afghanistan at the request of a friendly government to help put down an outside-sponsored insurgency, the imminent collapse of Amin's Marxist regime evidently prompted the invasion. Amin had been in power for less than 3 months; as deputy prime minister, he had seized control in September 1979 after reportedly killing his party rival, President and Prime Minister Noor Mohammed Taraki. Taraki himself had come to power in the bloody April 1978 coup that ended decades of rule by the Mohammadzai clan of the Durrani tribe. The Afghan resistance movement developed in response to attempts by the Taraki regime and its successors to impose its rule and a variety of Marxist-style "reforms" that ran counter to the deeply rooted traditions of the Afghan people.

Now in its 8th year, the resistance continues to deny to the Soviets the fruits of their attempted conquest. Despite improved counterinsurgency tactics and the presence of 116,000-118,000 Soviet troops, the Soviets have failed to establish the authority of the puppet Kabul government. Karmal's replacement in May 1986 by former Afghan secret police chief Najibullah and the intraparty bickering this has produced testify to the Soviet Union's continuing inability to establish a stable client regime.

Resistance developments: Although still troubled by internal divisions, the alliance of seven Afghan resistance parties formed in May 1985 has grown militarily more effective. Since the start of 1986, it has strengthened its presence within and outside Afghanistan by forming committees to implement health, education, agriculture, and commodity support projects for war-affected Afghans inside the country. These efforts counter Soviet attempts to force people out of the resistance-dominated countryside and have contributed toward the development of needed administrative skills. Visits by alliance delegations to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the UN Human Rights Commission, and the UN General Assembly have helped to focus attention on the Afghan cause, while projecting the alliance as a representative political entity. In June 1986 President Reagan officially received a resistance delegation headed by the alliance spokesman.

UN efforts: Since January 1980, the UN General Assembly has overwhelmingly approved eight resolutions that call for a negotiated political settlement based on four principles:

- Complete withdrawal of Soviet troops;
- Restoration of an independent and nonaligned Afghanistan;
- Self-determination for the Afghan people; and
- Return of all of the refugees from Afghanistan with safety and honor.

To implement these principles, indirect negotiations between Pakistan and the Kabul regime have been underway in Geneva since June 1982 under the auspices of the UN Secretary General's personal representative; the seventh round of talks ended inconclusively in August 1986 when the Kabul authorities failed to provide a reasonable timetable for the withdrawal of all Soviet forces.

Soviet policy: The Soviets pursued their Afghanistan policy with renewed vigor in 1986, trying new tactics both on the battlefield and in their efforts to gain legitimacy for the puppet regime. Increased reliance on elite commando units and air mobility have been accompanied by hints of flexibility at the negotiating table and calls for renewed efforts toward national reconciliation. In July 1986, General Secretary Gorbachev announced plans to withdraw six regiments from Afghanistan. Concluded in October, the withdrawal turned out to be a sham; it had no effect on Soviet combat effectiveness inasmuch as most of the regiments withdrawn were either anti-aircraft or armored units of little use in a guerrilla war. Also, the Soviets had introduced two new motorized rifle regiments and several dozen tanks following Gorbachev's statement, for the sole purpose of withdrawing them in October.

At the same time, the Soviets and the Kabul regime have escalated cross-border sabotage and penetrations of Pakistani territory that were calculated in part to increase public unease in Pakistan. Through October 1986, there have been about 650 violations of Pakistani territory, a 150% increase over the total for 1985.

US policy: US opposition to the Soviet invasion remains strong. The US supports the UN-sponsored negotiations in Geneva and has indicated it is willing to lend political support in the context of a comprehensive settlement. In the absence of such a settlement, the US has made clear that, until all Soviet forces depart, it will support the Afghan cause.

The US has substantially expanded its efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghans inside Afghanistan. In fiscal year 1987, the humanitarian assistance program for war-affected Afghans is budgeted at \$30 million, a 100% increase over fiscal year 1986. This program is in addition to the \$484 million spent since January 1980 to help the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.